Becoming Levantine: Egypt through the Lens of the Department Store in Jacqueline Kahanoff’s *Jacob’s Ladder*
talk by 
Amr Kamal

Living in colonial Egypt, Jacqueline Kahanoff had a unique experience shared by the members of her class and generation. Kahanoff was a Jewish Anglophone writer from Egypt born to Francophone Tunisian grandparents who owned a famous department store. For Kahanoff, Cairene department stores embody a model of cosmopolitanism that challenges at once British colonial culture and Egyptian nationalism. Taking the stores as a model for citizenship, she suggests an alternative notion of Mediterranean culture and Egyptian identity, which decentralizes European hegemony, a notion which she later dubs “Levantinism.” Kamal analyzes her 1921 novel, *Jacob’s Ladder* to examine the different types of Egyptian cosmopolitanisms that encompass different classes and communities. *Jacob’s Ladder* could be considered a pioneer work in the consideration of the concept of Levantinism, which later gains popularity, after decades of dismissal, in Israeli literature and culture.

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Prof. Suha Kudsieh (English, CSI, CUNY) will offer comments.